

Encompassing Comparisons of Protests in Jordan

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ALL COMMENTS AND CRITICISMS WILL BE GRATEFULLY RECEIVED!

Dear GC Comparative Politics Workshop participants,

I'm so grateful for the opportunity to present my research to the group for feedback. What you are reading represents most but not all of a new draft for my introductory chapter. The book is called *Protesting Jordan*, and while I have a full manuscript, I am currently working I'm trying the different chapters together with a clear through line. I am grateful for any and all feedback and criticism, but I am particularly interested in whether you find the structure for comparative analysis compelling. As a chapter, it will not begin precisely with the paragraphs that open this paper, but I structured this paper for you to highlight the comparative methodological approach.

Thank you so much and I look forward to seeing you all in early November!

Jillian

In my recent work, I have been particularly interested in comparisons of micro-practices: fine-grained analyses of individual protests utilizing an ethnographic sensibility to bring to light what protesters and security agencies understand to be happening as a protest unfolds. But analysis at the micro level is not inherently better than any other in producing theoretical insights. It brings different practices and understandings into view, but necessarily at the expense of insights that might emerge from meso- or macro-level analyses. One colleague described this analytic problem as the "Google Earth" tradeoff: one can zoom in so close that one can see gum on a sidewalk, but in doing so it becomes easy to miss (or forget) the larger picture.¹ Every level of zoom in or out brings certain details into focus at the expense of others, with no particular "view" more accurate than another.

But perhaps more importantly, levels of analysis are never entirely separate from each other. Micro dynamics are always present in the macro, as macro are in the micro, even if only one level at a time can be brought into sharp focus. Analyses pitched at any level of

¹ My colleague John Krinsky used this phrase in conversations about our respective research projects, July 2017.

analysis would do well to identify connections with levels of analysis and, even more than mere consideration, seek to understand their dialectic relationship. In my current work on protests, I aim to present such an analysis, leveraging ethnographic and micro-level insights to advance our understanding of more macro-level political dynamics, and vice versa. To wit, I identify competing narratives about the Hashemite regime's authority and explore how they shape some of the micro-practices of protests, and in turn examine how some of the micro practices of protests help construct narratives about (and challenges to) the Hashemite regime and its authority to rule.

Approaches to the study of protests

The concept of "protest" is often left undefined in the abundant literature examining protests across the globe, from antiquity to the present.² Scholars often treat the meaning of protest as self-evident: a gathering of persons (usually but not necessarily multiple persons) in a particular location in order to express dissent or assert a claim over an identified issue or condition.³ Protest can be done quietly, individually, and even secretly, but not unintentionally, and not only in one's own mind. Protest is dissent expressed, even if without the hope of realizing change.⁴ It is "explicit criticism of other people, organizations, and the things they believe or do" (Jasper 1997: 5).⁵ Protest also entails some form of action.⁶ Whistle blowing and speaking out can be acts of protest, and the perpetrators need not be part of an organization or movement.

² Theresa Urbainczyk (2008) offers a fascinating account of slave revolts in antiquity, culled from a wide range of documentary and literary sources.

³ The term "protest" has been used to refer to a wide range of activities, from strikes and demonstrations to riots and revolutions. Here I use the term in a broad sense to refer to gathers of people in space with the intention of asserting political claims or critiques.

⁴ Protests can be peaceful even if the claims they assert are radical or revolutionary, and they can turn violent even if the claims are limited in scope. There is no correlation between magnitude of grievance and level of violence. Many protests entail diverse dynamics and cannot as such be characterized in a singular manner. The 1999 "Battle of Seattle" that effectively shut down the opening sessions of the World Trade Organization, for example, included peaceful protest as well as vandalism, which brought forth policing practices ranging from peaceful to violent (Cockburn et al 2000; Reed 2005).

⁵ The idea of protest often entails a normative dimension: the possibility that humans, even those with the least power, have the capacity and possibility of not only expressing dissent—an act of protest alone—but of potentially realizing change as a result. James M. Jasper's introductory text, *Protest: A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements*, is exemplary of this perspective. Protests are "a fundamental part of human existence, and every period in history has the potential to bring about important changes" (2014: ix).

⁶ My book manuscript, *Protesting Jordan*, includes a more extensive examination of the concept of protest, distinguishing it from dissent. The former entails some action, however small, individual, or hidden, while the latter can (but does not necessarily) refer to a conscious position but not necessarily a related action. The scholarship does not make this distinction consistently, however.

Nevertheless, most studies of protests are anchored in the vast and diverse literatures on social movements and contentious politics. Often the unit of analysis is not the protest itself, but rather the organizing groups or the broader mobilization or collective action: protests are episodes in the narrative of a longer story of mobilization (or de-mobilization) over time. These analyses emphasize the actors who mount them rather than the political effects that the protests produce. As Jasper notes, “social movements are the form that protest most often takes in today’s world” (2014: ix). The goal of the research is often to understand the trajectory or life-cycle of that movement, with comparison made either explicitly (in dual or multi-cases analyses) or implicitly (in a detail case study with secondary or tertiary cases referenced to draw attention to similarities and differences). In both single- and multi-case comparisons of movements, the motivating comparative structure is either one of identifying and explaining variation, or the sequence of events and the mechanisms producing them, such as through process tracing.

A related approach to studying protests focuses on variations across protest events.⁷ Movements and groups are still a part of the analysis, but they are relegated to the background as the dynamics of protest events are brought to the fore. In this tradition, scholars collect data on a series or set of protest events and utilize the accumulation of data to identify patterns in protests, from one event to the next or across whole cycles (Tarrow 1993). Protest events are treated as independent observations, usually coded at the nation or state level. Standardized data sets are used to compare protest events with each other, and with other waves or cycles of protests, often through statistical analyses. As Pamela Oliver, Jorge Cadena-Roa, and Kelley D. Strawn note, events data analyses typically treat individual protest events as commensurate (2003: 220). They aim to capture the “who, what, where, when, and why” of events, code them into a standardized data set, and then use time-series distributions of variables to discern patterns that might not otherwise be readily recognizable. As Doug McAdam and William H. Sewell, Jr., note, work in this tradition is aimed toward “revealing the shape and dynamics of the ‘protest cycle’” (2001: 101), that is, the “regular, sequences of stages that *seemed* to characterize many periods of generalized social unrest, such as those that convulsed most of the western democracies in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (96, *italics added*). The larger goal of the analysis is to build nomothetic theory, what one key advocate of the approach identifies as “a unified theory of mobilization” (Oliver et al 2003: 220).

The rise of digitized media has been a boon for event analysis (Oliver et al 2003: 215), producing large quantities of data that are amenable for sorting into coding schemes. When these data are compiled, they can reveal patterns concerning the size of protest events, police responses, or the use of violence, to give just a few examples. Data that fits into coding schemes become legible to scholars, while other details or dynamics are obscured or ignored as irrelevant. In this way, events data takes a technical problem—coding schemes—and reduces the theoretical scope of what can be known. Oliver et al note that this scholarly approach

⁷ The literature is vast, but see for example: Tilly (1995), Franzosi (1995, 1998), Rucht et al (1998), McAdam (1999), Beissinger (2002), Oliver et al (2003), Wilkinson (2006).

favors 'minimalist' definitions for data collection that includes a very broad range of events, with factors such as size or disruptiveness incorporated as control variables in analyses (2003: 221).

As Tilly notes, the adherents of this approach prefer protest data structured as "abstract, uniform units of observation" (2008: 13) because such data facilitate modeling and quantitative analysis.⁸

All event aggregation analyses, whether using machine- or hand-coded data, can identify patterns only in variables amenable to coding. Because machine-coding is less efficient in capturing variation in intra-protest dynamics, it cannot capture such details as, for example, the dynamic between multiple policing agencies; timing of escalation or de-escalation within a single protest; the numbers and roles of all groups and actors involved; tensions and disagreements between participants (e.g., over the use of violence); or variations based on the location of the protest (more on this below). Some of these details might be captured under new coding schemes, but even careful hand coding must render the data into a standardized format in ways that obscure certain dynamics.

More significantly, coding can strip protests of the substantive "glue" that makes them meaningful to human political engagement: individual and collective understandings of the past, present, and future; political imaginations; the accumulating experiences and perspectives of all actors; multiple and heterogeneous temporalities; and spatial dimensions within individual protests as well as across cities, provinces, or whole countries.

⁸ Scholars have long noted the limitations of event-based analyses, which can be quite expensive as well. (For example, see Tarrow 1998.) Hand coding, for example, requires not only the development of a sophisticated coding scheme but also the extensive training of human coders. Because coders are often recruited from undergraduate and graduate student populations, many work for only a semester or two and thus need to be replaced regularly. Machine coding of protest events has additional limitations, trading level of detail for a greater quantity of data. Programs like Tabari—Text Analysis by Augmented Replacement Instructions, available: <http://eventdata.parusanalytics.com/software.dir/tabari.info.html>—draw data from only the first sentence of articles available in electronic formats, such as wire-service articles or online archives of publications. Information that does not appear in the first sentence is not captured at all, nor are discussions of protests that appear in articles on other topics. In my review of newspaper articles on protests in Jordan, for example, I noticed not only that crucial details often appear beyond the first sentence, but also that they frequently appear at the end of other, related articles. In news coverage of Jordan's creation of free trade zones, for example, I found mention of protests against the creation of the zones that had been "continuing for several days"; no articles were dedicated to what may have been large and sustained protests. Analysts of machine-coded protest events data are aware of these limitation, but they view the trade-offs as worthwhile when tens or hundreds of thousands of news stories can be coded in hours or days rather than years.

While working on a collaborative research project on repression and dissent in the Middle East,⁹ Philip Schrodtt, one of the early innovators in machine events data coding, ran data on protests in several Middle Eastern countries including Jordan. Examining digitized wire-service articles on Jordan over a 30-year period, the programing identified too few events to conduct a statistical analysis of the data.¹⁰ I subsequently began to construct my own, hand-coded, protest events data set for Jordan. I first used common-sense categories and later adapted Steven Wilkenson and Ashutosh Varshney's "Data-Entering Protocol for Riot Database" (2006, Appendix B). In particular, I wanted to include geographical data, noting the locations of protests as precisely as possible. I also recorded the various policing agencies engaged in protests, including information about the timing of their participation. My hunch was that in addition to the identity of the protest organizers and the specific claims they were making (the who and what of protests), the location of protests would impact the response of the regime. Thus, if riot police were involved, I wanted to note whether they were present at the outset of the protest or whether they arrived after the protests seemed to escalate. What about other policing agencies (general police, special forces, the army, etc.)? I was interested in identifying patterns of protest and policing of them over time any space, capturing dynamics within a single protest over a period of hours, days, or weeks.

Whereas Schrodtt's efforts for our collaborative project found too few events to evaluate statistically, I found myself overwhelmed with the amount of material to code. Working first from one English daily newspaper¹¹ and then with multiple Arabic-language weeklies and dailies in Jordan, I identified hundreds of protests each year in the 1990s and 2000s, and sometimes thousands. I had also accumulated significant information from dozens of interviews with activists and government officials, and through attending several dozen protests in Amman. Several student research assistants aided me over the years, but I discovered that to adequately code the vast number of protests events in Jordan, I would need an army of coders and a large grant—neither of which were within of my capacities.

An additional problem is that most events data sets rely on media coverage that never captures all political activity, particularly in authoritarian settings in which the regime is keen to keep some oppositional activities off the radar. But I also discovered a problem in terms of journalists in general and in particular stringers—freelance writers whose income may be tied to producing articles that are most likely to get picked up by international wire services. That is, stringers often focus on topics of interest to potential wire service customers (both the newspapers that pay for their services and the eventual readers). All journalists write for their editors and readers, of course, but the incomes of stringers can be more directly tied to producing articles that will be picked up.

⁹ National Science Foundation grant # 0527339, "The Repression-Dissent Nexus in the Middle East," 2005-2008. I was a co-principle investigator with Christian Davenport, Deborah J. Gerner, Craig Jenkins, Katherine Meyer, Philip Schrodtt, and Mary Ann Tétreault.

¹⁰ Machine coding also largely relies on English-language sources, although is changing as scholars write software that can search in other languages [Ketchley; OTHER CITES].

¹¹ The Jordan Times

In the case of the Middle East, English-language audiences are particularly interested in protests that may impact U.S. or Israeli interests. Jordan is widely viewed as a moderate and steadfast ally of both states, so news coverage within the United States tends to portray the regime as moderate and modern while focusing on the kingdom's stability and its support for U.S. military and political interventions in the region. Less coverage is dedicated to internal Jordanian affairs, except when it impacts U.S. or Israeli interests. As a result, protests in Jordan that critique Israel or the United States receive regular international media coverage, even when attended by only a few dozen protesters. Journalists are quick to cover protests where U.S. or Israeli flags are burned, even if the events are brief or small in size. Labor strikes, sit-ins, and work stoppages, however, are rarely reported.¹²

Unsurprisingly, machine-coded events data on Jordan do not come close to reflecting the volume or diversity of protests. English-language wire stories show spikes in protests in 2000 and 2002 (against Israeli actions on Palestinian territories), in 2003 (against the U.S. invasion of Iraq), and in 2011 with the onset of the Arab uprisings. But protests took place in each of the intervening years, including labor strikes and numerous demonstrations outside of parliament, the office of the prime minister, on campuses, and in refugee camps. Scholars have long documented and analyzed the Orientalist portrayal of Middle Eastern societies in the western media.¹³ But less recognized is the rent-seeking behavior of wire-service stringers, who make a living by writing stories that interest potential readers and not by aiming to accurately capture all dimensions of politics—a feat that would be challenging for an army of journalists, but impossible for one or two individuals.

Journalists are also human: they fall in love, change jobs, and relocate. During one extended research stay in Jordan, I came to know a wire-service stringer who covered some events of interest to my research. His work was excellent, and I attended several protests with him. He once confessed that he had a bit of a crush on another researcher (not me), and consequently began to file an increased number of stories on the topic of that scholar's research, which was peripherally related to protests. Events data coding of protests during that period would capture a spike in certain protests, when the spike reflected only a sudden increase in coverage.¹⁴ Furthermore, as one stringer departs and another takes up the position, changed prioritization of coverage can be picked up by event data coding as spikes or declines, without understanding the reason why.¹⁵

¹² Scholarly exceptions include the work of Adaly, Fioroni (2015), and Ababneh (2016), but coverage in the Western media is negligent.

¹³ Do I need a longer discussion of media bias on the Middle East in general, or is that too obvious?

¹⁴ In larger data sets, these effects would not be significant. But when such English-language sources identify only a few dozen protests over a decade or more, a surge in reportage like this would suggest misleading patterns of protest events.

¹⁵ This problem might be lessened by coding article datelines, when available. Datelines indicate the location—typically a city—from which the author reported or filed an article.

Nevertheless, I must credit my (failed) efforts to comprehensively code protest events in Jordan for helping me to recognize the enormous number of protests in the kingdom. Far from occasional bursts of protests lasting a few days or weeks, protest was a routine part of political life in Jordan. Coding also helped me to identify some interesting patterns in the policing of protests depending on location, which I will discuss in the larger manuscript. It also helped me to reflect on the ways in which approaching protests as discrete events shapes what we see. Eventually, however, I abandoned the endeavor entirely because I became interested in other dynamics, notably temporal and spatial aspects of meaning-making that could not be easily coded.

Encompassing comparisons

If studies of protests based on social movement theory and events data analyses are problematic (in terms of what they miss), what might an alternative look like? Building on the insight that micro dynamics are always present in the macro and macro in the micro, I suggest a more dialectic approach to the study of protests. I use an ethnographic lens to examine the micro dynamics of some political protests in Jordan in order to bring forth new insights about the bases of challenges to the Hashemite regime's authority; likewise, I explore how the competing narratives of Hashemite rule shape individual protests events and, in particular, the competing histories and symbolism that are invoked by different actors before, during, and after protests. This approach to the study of protests brings to light both the weaknesses and strengths of the regime (and its challengers), the uneven reach of state institutions over time and space, and the extent to which both state and non-state actors question the regime's authority to rule.

My approach of combining ethnographic examinations of protests with larger narratives about the state, regime, and nation explicitly builds on Charles Tilly's notion of encompassing comparisons (1984). In his *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*, Tilly describes what he sees as four broad types of comparative analysis. The two most common are individualizing comparisons (a single case studies that emphasizes the historic particularities of that case, even as secondary comparisons are explored) and variation-finding structured comparisons (including but not limited to most-similar and most-different research designs). Less common are universalizing comparisons (a single case study seen as exemplary) and encompassing comparisons. I do not aim here to debate Tilly's characterizations or his interpretations of their relative strengths and weaknesses for political analyses. But as my work on protests developed, I found myself reflecting on his notion of encompassing comparisons, particularly as I poured over my ethnographic notes. I am therefore exploring its utility as a foundation for developing a more satisfying theoretical framework for the study of protests.

Encompassing comparisons examine a large process or structure but seek to understand how individual cases are structured by their relation to the whole (1984: 125-143). In Tilly's words,

Encompassing comparisons begin with a large structure or process. They select locations within the structure or process and explain similarities or differences

among those locations as a consequence of their relationship to the whole. In everyday life, people use encompassing comparisons all the time: explaining the difference between two children's behavior by their orders of birth, attributing the characteristics of communities to their varying connections with a nearby metropolis, accounting for the behavior of executives in terms of their positions in the firm's organization chart (125).

The larger structures are never determinative, in the manner of functionalist explanations, and each "case" has its own dynamics. But a full analysis must take account of the individual instances in terms of their relation to the larger structure or process.

Encompassing comparisons differ from variation-finding comparisons. Although they may bring to light similarities and differences across component cases or parts, those parts are always understood to be inextricably related to some larger whole; they are never treated as isolated or self-contained cases with unique histories. Encompassing comparisons have no need for "scientific" notions such as control variables or causal mechanisms. Instead, the focus is on how the micro relates to the macro and vice versa. Encompassing comparisons necessarily consider temporal and spatial dynamics, which are often overlooked in standard variation-finding comparisons.

Variation-finding studies of the Arab uprisings, for example, treat the uprisings as a set of individual cases whose diverse trajectories must be explained. Why did the uprising "fail" in Bahrain but "succeed" in Tunisia? Why did civil war break out in Yemen, Libya, and Syria but not in Tunisia and Egypt? Connections between cases are discussed in medical or scientific terms (contagion and diffusion, respectively), approaches that preserve the notion of states as units, even if they might have "connections." An encompassing comparison of the uprisings, in contrast, would maintain focus on the whole set of uprisings as a set of practices of economic power, surveillance technologies, international alliances, and practices of repression (to name just a few), and the manner in which people began to push back against the ways in which those processes and practices work to order populations and contain their challenges for the benefit of particular and identifiable sets of actors and interests. An encompassing comparison would examine the distinct processes within national setting while also exploring whether any of those sets of macro relationships and practices were unsettled by the mobilizations (few seem to have been). Such an approach would stand in stark comparison to the variation-finding models that treat states as individual cases to be sorted into columns of "successes" and "failures" in ways that obscure the ways in which global patterns of financial flow and repression both created the conditions for the uprisings and prevented them from realizing their goals.

I develop a different kind of encompassing comparison for my analysis of protests in Jordan in order to understand how competing narratives are invoked in protests to call into question the Hashemite regime's authority, even as some protest events also work to shore up regime power. The title of my book manuscript—*Protesting Jordan*—captures both the extent to which Jordanians are engaging in protests against the regime and its policies, and the fact that protests call into question the regime's claimed authority over a territory and state whose boundaries were established through colonial fiat. This approach also

contributes to the literature that emphasizes that the actors do not fit neatly into state-opposition binaries.¹⁶ Challenges to regime authority also come from ostensibly pro-regime camps, notably from the regime's so-called "traditional tribal support base" as well as within certain security sectors.¹⁷

The result may be less satisfying for those who prefer a "scientific" approach of supposedly objective analysis that controls for variation (as much as possible) to provide parsimonious answers. Instead, my approach will highlight tensions and connections, seeking to move beyond the fragmentary but without the aim of (unattainable) comprehensiveness. The clarity that emerges, if it does, should be read as provisional and situated.

Protesting Jordan

Scholars have long explored what many describe as Jordan's identity problem,¹⁸ particularly tensions between Jordan's Palestinian and non-Palestinian populations—a divide that government policies exacerbate even as the regime invests millions in public relations campaigns and branding projects aimed at lessening those cleavages. Other questions of identity emerged from the regime's early (and ongoing) efforts to build a unified national identity. But if multiple narratives about Jordanian history and identity have always been politically salient, what analytic insights do we gain by carefully examining protests through an encompassing comparison?

Protests are not only events at which political claims are expressed, but they also entail struggle over the control of public spaces and what those spaces mean. Those who gather and participate in a protest in a particular space advance a set of grievances that are part of a narrative with visions of the past, present, and future of those people.¹⁹ Protests, because they entail contests over the meanings attached to particular spaces, invoke temporalities that work as the glue for particular narratives.

In my ethnographic study of individual protest, I found that they expose multiple challenges to the Hashemite regime, but not because mass mobilizations threaten to overthrow the regime. Rather, protests serve as occasions for the public display of

¹⁶ Cites.

¹⁷ As argued elsewhere in the manuscript, these two sectors overlap considerably but not entirely.

¹⁸ Most of these have to do with tensions created by the waves of Palestinian refugees into Jordan and their status as Jordanian citizens. See, for example, Brand 1994; Lynch 1999; Abu-Odeh 1999; Ryan 2011; Bustani 2011(a), 2011(b); Khirfan and Momani 2013. A number of those also explore state identity-making projects separate from the Palestinian question, most notably Massad 2001.

¹⁹ Sometimes the narratives of different participants in a protest are incongruent, even as they find a moment of symmetry adequate to make cooperation possible. Such moments of symmetry are necessary for mass mobilizations such as revolutions, during which a wide range of groups and interests agree on a single, immediate objective: the regime must go.

alternative visions of what the state—or some other form of political authority structures—can or should be. Protests do so by invoking alternative histories and visions for the future that call into question the regime’s narrative of its place in Jordan’s past, present, and future. These competing histories are evident not only in the rhetoric and symbolism of the protest actions themselves (slogans, etc.), but at times are also invoked by the symbolism of particular places that protests are held.

Protests also serve as moments for the assertion of regime power and authority, and for groups of protesters to build identity and communal connections.²⁰

Like any state, multiple political visions thrive in Jordan in ways that sometimes reject and sometimes imbricate with state-sanctioned narratives. The most radical of these alternative visions question the rule of the Hashemite regime itself, portraying it as a foreign-supported interloper whose control of state institutions will not be indefinite. Such challenges to the regime come not only from the opposition, but also from within traditionally pro-regime spheres.

To be sure, the Hashemite regime’s hold over state institutions appears strong. And in many ways, protests ironically can work to shore up the regime’s power by showcasing its ability to allow, contain, or repress dissent. Protests also bring into view the regime’s efforts to control and alter material space in ways that, not always intentionally, deflate the disruptive potential of protests and lessen their visibility.

In this last section, I discuss one protest that brings into view multiple and competing narratives about the Hashemite regime’s authority and how those narratives—stories about Jordan’s past, present, and future—shape protests, and how those protests in turn reproduce and sometimes alter narratives about the Hashemite regime and its authority to rule.

The Anti-Israeli Trade Fair of 1997

In January 8, 1997, 4,000 Jordanians gathered along a road leading to the International Exhibition Hall in Marj al-Hammam,²¹ near the south-western outskirts of Amman.²² The event was a protest organized by the National Committee for the Cancellation of the Israeli Trade Fair (henceforth, the Committee), a diverse group of leftists, Islamists, professional association leaders, and former government officials. The Committee had circulated a statement to journalists and within their various networks informing Jordanians that Israeli companies were infiltrating the Jordanian economy. “Six food and clothes factories dominated by Israeli companies are already operating in Jordan,” the statement declared,

²⁰ There is a large literature on the diverse political work that is “done” in protests. I discuss this work elsewhere in the book.

²¹ In the twenty years since, the capital has experienced a westward sprawl that engulfed the site; a new convention center has subsequently been built at a new location.

²² A significantly more detailed examination of these protests, which extended over several days, is presented in Schwedler (2005).

noting that Israeli shares in those factories ranged from 51–65 percent. Even more troubling, most of those textiles produced by Jordanians and on Jordanian soil were exported bearing “Made in Israel” labels (Abed 1997c). The Committee highlighted these issues to frame the planned protest against the trade fair as an expression of concern for domestic, Jordanian interests. Participating in the fair, even if it offered financial opportunity for certain Jordanian businesses, meant allying with the enemy State of Israel and producing goods in its name with profits accruing to Israeli companies. Protesting the fair was an act of patriotism.

Jordan’s relations with Israel date to the early years of the kingdom, when Great Britain installed the Hijazi-born Abdullah I bin Hussein as emir of Transjordan following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire during World War I. While the depth of those relations—mediated first by Great Britain and later by the United States—have been well documented (Wilson 1987; Schlaim 1987; Ben-Zvi 2007), inside Jordan the regime sought to keep much of those contacts hidden. The regime did not venture to forge formal diplomatic relations with the State of Israel until 1987, when Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and King Hussein negotiated an agreement that would concede the West Bank to Jordan in exchange for peace; when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin objected, the agreement was abandoned.²³ During the Gulf war of 1990-1991, King Hussein bowed to domestic pressure and refused to permit the U.S.-led coalition the use of Jordanian land and airspace for the campaign to oust Iraqi troops from Kuwait. The United States, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait punished the regime by severing aid to the kingdom; the results were devastating. King Hussein aimed to restore those relations—and the economic aid that went with them—raising the possibility of a formal peace treaty with Israel in the shadow of the Madrid and later Oslo talks (aimed at advancing Palestinian-Israeli peace).²⁴ Jordan and Israel reached agreement in 1994, and a formal peace treaty was ceremoniously signed in southern Israel, near the Jordanian border on October 26 of that year.²⁵

Among Jordanians—a majority of whom are Palestinian²⁶—the peace treaty was highly unpopular. The real difficulty for the regime, however, was that the treaty needed to be ratified by Jordan’s elected lower house of parliament. Although Jordan’s opposition parties were deeply divided—notably between leftist and Islamist camps—the regime recognized that all of the opposition deputies were certain to vote against a peace treaty.

²³ The following year, Jordan relinquished its claim over the West Bank as it recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

²⁴ King Hussein was also concerned about Jordan being side-lined in directly talks between the PLO and Israel. US President Bill Clinton further enticed King Hussein to sign a peace treaty with Israel by promising to forgive Jordan’s debts to the United States.

²⁵ A Declaration was signed in Washington, DC, on July 25, 1994, announcing the end of belligerency between Jordan and Israel and that the two would work toward full relations. The final agreement was signed in Wadi Araba that November.

²⁶ The book manuscript explores multiple waves of refugees into Jordan beginning in the late 19th century, and the ways in which their settling in particular locations shaped the political geography of the country—dynamics that continue to play out in protests.

Even more, the opposition parties elected in the 1989 poll together held a majority of the seats in the assembly. To insure that fewer opposition deputies would be elected in the November 1993 elections—and thus to insure that a peace treaty would be readily ratified—the prime minister announced a new electoral law in the Summer of 1993.²⁷ Although framed as an American-style “one person, one vote” system, Jordan’s oppositional political parties immediately recognized the law for what it was: an effort to elevate the representation of certain pro-regime sectors while diminishing the representation of oppositional voices.²⁸ After the November votes were tallied, the results of the new law came into stark relief; the number of opposition deputies was reduced by half.²⁹ The treaty was signed a year later.³⁰

January 1997 Israeli trade fair was scheduled in accordance with a provision in the peace treaty concerning the normalization of economic cooperation. Numerous political parties, trade unions, and professional associations had already taken stances against the normalization of relations between Jordan and Israel. The protest against the trade fair represented a coordinated effort between opposition groups across the political spectrum, but not the first of its kind. In addition to strong opposition voices, the Committee was chaired by former prime minister Ahmad Obaydat, also former head of the General

²⁷ Jordan’s parliament has two assemblies: an elected lower house, or Council of Deputies, and a royally appointed upper house, or Council of Nobles. Legislation must originate in the lower house.

²⁸ The opposition parties were largely divided along Islamist-leftist lines, and thus they seldom cooperated or coordinated to use their collective majority to advantage. They had very different programmatic priorities. But with the new electoral law, they found common ground. Soon after the new law was announced, they held a joint press conference condemning the changes as a blatant attempt to diminish their voices in the next assembly. That event marked a turning point in Islamist-leftist relations. See Schwedler (2006) for detailed analysis of that evolving relationship.

²⁹ The changes included redistricting and a change from a multiple transferable vote system (where each voter could cast as many votes as seats in their district, distributed in any manner they wish) to single non-transferable vote (a single vote in a multi-member district). The regime’s studies of the electoral system suggested, correctly, that this switch would not allow voters to support both local elites (a patronage vote) and opposition political party candidates (a so-called ideological vote). With only one vote to cast, voters overwhelmingly supported local candidates and the combined share of opposition seats was reduced from 60 percent following the 1989 contest to 33% [CHECK] following the 1993 contest—a pro-regime majority that was sufficient to insure the passing of the peace treaty. See Schwedler (2006: xxxx) and Ryan (2002).

³⁰ To be sure, the regime had reasons other than the ratification of the peace treaty to seek a more loyalist assembly. In particular, the Islamist deputies who made up the largest single bloc—40%—in the 1989 assembly had proved troublesome for the regime, mobilizing opposition to regime-favored policies. The new electoral law is widely seen as aimed at diminishing the influence of Islamists, although its effects were felt acutely by all of the opposition political parties.

Intelligence Directorate (GID, the *mukhabarat* or secret police).³¹ The Committee succeeded in mobilizing popular opposition to the trade fair, which it hoped to channel into protests that would shut down the event, scheduled to open on the morning of January 6. Even more, it hoped to demonstrate to the regime the widespread opposition to normalized relations with Israel. The Committee planned protests for the duration of the four-day fair.

Days before the fair's scheduled opening, as the strength of the opposition became apparent, the Jordanian government announced that it was not directly sponsoring the fair. As Minister of Information Marwan Muasher stated, "The government is not a party to this exhibition, and there is a treaty between Jordan and Israel which is the legal reference for such issues." He also noted that Jordanians had the right to protest the fair, as long as they did so within the boundaries of the law (Abed 1997c).³² As the breadth of opposition became evident, the organizers considered canceling the fair entirely, but instead they delayed the opening by two days.

Protestors began congregating around the exhibition center on January 4, two days before the original scheduled opening. The Public Security Directorate (PSD, in Arabic *Amn al-'Amm*) forces constructed a cordon approximately 200 yards from the fair entrance, but did not otherwise interfere with the gathering crowds. Security forces camped along the roadway near the protesters. Organizers delayed the opening by two days.

By 8 am January 8, more than 4,000 Jordanians had assembled in protest, swamping the streets of the neighborhood. They were flanked by hundreds of security forces in riot gear, organized into two columns along the main road to the exhibition center. King Hussein left Jordan for talks with Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak; he thus was not only conspicuously silent but also absent from Jordan for the duration of the protests. Shimon Shamir, Israel's ambassador to Jordan, inaugurated the opening of the fair along with a Jordanian official who was flown in by helicopter to avoid the protesters. Shamir acknowledged the presence of the protesters in his comments: "It is the right of opposition groups to protest because Jordan is a democratic country" (The Jerusalem Post 1997c).

³¹ Obaydat insured at least limited space for mounting the demonstrations by acquiring a permit from the Ministry of the Interior in October prior to the event. It is likely that the request to hold the anti-trade fair demonstrations was granted at least in part because it came from such a prominent former government official. Obaydat brought a range of voices onto the organizing Committee and included a number of groups in the organization of the demonstrations. The Committee drew its support from three networks that strongly opposed the 1994 peace treaty between Jordan and Israel: some business associations, trade unions and professional associations, and the opposition bloc in parliament.

³² At the time, the Jordanian regime was frustrated with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's proposed destruction of the Palestinian neighborhood of Har Homa in East Jerusalem in order to build new Jewish settlements there. Jordanian officials, with regime support, did not go out of their way to support the Israeli trade fair. Interview with Minister of Information Marwan Muasher, February 9, 1997, Amman.

The trade fair opened two days and three hours late. More than 200 Israeli companies from jewelry, garment, and textile manufactures had registered to participate, but only 70 remained on the list by opening day. Of those, less than half were present. Even fewer potential Jordanian partners attended, save those who entered secretly by side roads. Israeli exhibitors told journalists that the only Jordanians they saw were PSD officers strolling the aisles inside the hall.

According to Committee member Tamir Obaydat, the goal of the protests was to dissuade Jordanian businesses from attending by creating an environment that would shame them from entering, portraying those who did attend as collaborators with Israeli counterparts.³³ The Committee framed its claims not exclusively within anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist rhetoric, but within a context of Jordanian patriotism. Any Jordanian attending the fair was betraying not only the Palestinian cause, but Jordan itself. Protesters carried banners and placards that bore slogans such as “End the Israeli Trade Fair Now” and “Jordan is not the Zionist bridge to the Arab world,” but also “Say Yes to Jordan.” Jordanian flags were more numerous than Palestinian flags.³⁴

The protests were overwhelmingly peaceful, although front-line protesters at times attempted to push back the police lines. Security forces occasionally fired colored water from the cannons onto the crowds, but in an overhead manner so as to mark the protesters (for later identification) and warn them against advancing; protesters did not feel that the police tactics were intended to disperse them as much as contain them and warn them to not push too far.³⁵ Some officers attempted to tear down the banners of the protestors, but reportedly with only limited success. Speakers at the protests mirrored the composition of the Committee in spanning the political spectrum. Prominent political leaders in attendance included Toujan Faisal (then Jordan’s only female parliamentary deputy, an independent and progressive), Islamic Action Front (IAF) Secretary-General Ishaq Farhan, and leftist Sulieman Arar, among many others.

After a break for the noon prayer on the first day of the fair, some protesters began directing their chants toward members of the security forces, notably the front-line forces in riot gear. “How can you defend the Zionists who want to harm your homeland?” they shouted. “Don’t you love your country? Why are you betraying Jordan?”

Riot police globally don dark masks not only for protection from projectiles but also to create a barrier of another sort between them and the protesters—a barrier that inhibits direct eye contact and thus human connection. Protesters try to “break through” that barrier, appealing to individual riot police in an effort to connect with them on a personal, human level. Protesters want riot police officers to hesitate and consider their individual culpability in advancing certain interests while silencing alternative claims. They also want

³³ Interview, February 23, 1997, Amman. Tamir, son of Ahmed Obaydat, received a JD from Harvard Law School.

³⁴ This conclusion is drawn primarily from several protesters, but also from photographic evidence.

³⁵ Interview with protester Khalid Ramadan, June 5, 1997, Amman.

those officers to see protesters as an assemblage of citizens expressing a valid claim, rather than as a faceless and unlawful mob. To do so, protesters frequently frame their claims as patriotic. This “wrap yourself in the flag” strategy aims to make repression of protesters more difficult: How can you repress your fellow citizens who are only acting out of love of and loyalty to the nation? If you repress or silence us, then whose side are you on?

As part of the Committee’s pro-Jordan strategy, it enjoined several newspapers to include paper Jordanian flags in their editions during the trade fair so that Jordanians would have them at the ready to display in their car windows and elsewhere. With patriotic rhetoric prominent at the protests themselves, the riot police were challenged to ignore accusations that their defense of the Israeli trade fair was a betrayal to their country.

Jordan’s security forces include large contingents of Bedouin origin or otherwise drawn from heavily tribal regions (Massad 2001; Pollack 2002). On the afternoon of that first day, portions of security forces clad in riot gear began to sing tribal songs and perform traditional Bedouin dances, which are often performed in a line. Whether they did so spontaneously or at the prodding of a commanding officer is unclear. But as security forces began to perform songs and dances deeply associated with Bedouin traditions, they answered the protesters’ entreaties: Their Bedouin song and dance announced, “It is we who are authentic Jordanians, and our loyalty to the nation is beyond question.” Indeed, their response marked the Palestine question as distinct from a Jordan question, suggesting that normalization with Israel was not against Jordanian national interests. If the Palestine question is an issue about a foreign conflict—given that Jordan is not Palestine—then the protesters advocating for a Palestinian cause were the ones who were, in fact, prioritizing a foreign cause over domestic interests. The surprising response of the security services becomes legible as a statement about who is truly acting on behalf of the nation and, indeed, who is Jordanian.

Debates about Jordan’s identity abound, but invocations of stark Transjordanian-Palestinian tensions—widespread inside Jordan as well as in scholarly and journalist analyses of Jordanian politics—obscure other fissures in Jordanian society. Among these are tensions within “Transjordanian” social spheres—spheres that have never cohered except in the sense of being “not Palestinian.”³⁶

The narratives and oral histories of the diverse pro-regime camp—including Bedouin and settled tribes frequently invoke local and regional social and political configurations that predate the establishment of the Hashemite. The Bedouin songs and dances at the trade fair not only offered a response to the protesters’ chants, but brought to the fore the ongoing tensions in—and incompleteness of—the Hashemite state-making project. While the regime has sought to coopt a Bedouin history and identity to cement its moral authority

³⁶ As in the larger book manuscript, the notion of a unified “tribal” base loyal to the Hashemite regime is inaccurate. Distinctions and tensions between urban and rural, settled and Bedouin, various regions, and even competing tribes within a single region continue to play a role in Jordanian politics today.

to rule Jordan from the 1920s until today, those “loyal” support bases continue to invoke narratives that portray the Hashemite regime as an interloper.

Because those competing histories are invoked by a range of actors in the course of protests, the latter work to reproduce and sometimes even reshape those larger competing narratives. Protests are less easily contained than institutionalized politics, such as elections, political parties, or licensed civil society organizations, because the confrontations, claims, and responses are made in real time. Protests are unpredictable, which is why regimes across the political spectrum—from authoritarian to democratic—find them nervous-making. And because protests are mounted in identifiable physical spaces, they work to inscribe particular meanings and histories into those places. At future moments, those spaces can invoke memories of possibilities and alternative futures, or else of repression and silencing of those alternatives.

From Amman to the Alamo

The stakes of competing narratives or histories are politically high when they call into question who has the authority to rule. Because history is always produced within a particular historical context, “historical actors are also narrators, and vice versa” (Trouillot 1995: 22). The objective for a political analysis is always to “get the story right” as much as possible, achieving that goal often entails identifying the interplay of competing historical narratives more than settling on a single narrative of “what actually happened.” Indeed, competing political actors may seldom agree on “what happened” at all. This is not to suggest that all narratives are equally valid. But where alternative narratives signal competing political stakes, projects, and visions, those differences become the very stuff of politics, even if they seem secondary to more visible political struggles, such as protester versus security forces, citizen versus regime, Palestinian versus Transjordanian.

The historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot begins his meditation on power, historiography, and the stakes of political narratives with a discussion of the events that unfolded in today’s Texas (then a Mexican province) at the Alamo standoff—a pivotal battle in the war over what would become the secessionist Republic of Texas. Some aspects of the standoff are little disputed: Mexican general Antonio López de Santa Anna roundly defeated the English-speakers who had occupied the old mission of San Antonio de Valero in Tejas. Following a twelve-day siege, the Mexican forces launched a putsch that killed most if not all of the hundred or so defenders (1995: 1-3). A few weeks later, Santa Anna himself fell prisoner to Texan troops under the command of Sam Houston during a battle at San Jacinto.³⁷ But the political stakes of the history are how those events are anchored in longer narratives, particularly concerning questions of justice and moral authority to rule. As Trouillot puts it,

in many important ways, [Mexican general Santa Anna] was doubly defeated at San Jacinto. He lost the battle of the day, but he also lost the battle he had won at the

³⁷ Santa Anna “went on to be four more times the leader of a much reduced Mexico” (Trouillot 1995: 2).

Alamo. Houston's men had punctuated their victorious attack on the Mexican army with repeated shouts of "Remember the Alamo! Remember the Alamo!" With that reference to the old mission, they doubly made history. As actors, they captured Santa Anna and neutralized his forces. As narrators, they gave the Alamo story a new meaning. The military loss of March was no longer the end point of the narrative but a necessary turn in the plot, the trial of the heroes, which, in turn, made final victory both inevitable and grandiose. With the battle cry of San Jacinto, Houston's men reversed for more than a century the victory Santa Anna thought he had gained in San Antonio (2).

The temporalities of those competing narratives not only amount to distinct histories—of Mexican resistance and of Texan or U.S. manifest destiny—but they evoke alternative futures. Just as the Englishmen's defeat at the Alamo was either a Mexican victory or a temporary loss in a larger battle, the Alamo could again be "won" by the reestablishment of Mexican narrative authority over those events—a revisionist history that not only reclaims alternative interpretations of past events but opens the possibility of alternative futures.

In this sense, even the most seemingly entrenched dominant narratives are never complete projects; they must be continually maintained and substantiated to fend off competing visions. The narrative of Texan (or US) victory despite the defeat at the Alamo must be continuously reproduced through the enshrinement of the site as a tourist destination of historic importance to US history rather than as a failure of Mexicans to defend Mexican lands. While the reproduction aims to silence alternative narratives, the latter may make small gains in such a way that a new dominant history is produced—one that maintains US authority over the narrative but accommodates the troublesome challenges by native American and Mexican voices by relegating them to minor, secondary roles. Yes, the English colonial settlers established authority over today's United States of America through a bloody genocide of native Americans, but the big story is of the establishment of a great and democratic nation where freedom reigns.

At the Alamo historic site, American children don Davey Crocket-style coon-skin hats purchased from the gift shop, but the Inter-Tribal council of American Indians seeks to have the burial grounds of more than a thousand Native American Catholics adjacent to the Alamo officially recognized as sacred grounds by the state of Texas and the city of Antonio. More than a side project, what Trouillot calls the "second battle of the Alamo" questions the very meaning of the siege: was the Alamo a brutal slaughter of brave English-speaking pioneers who decided

to fight until death rather than surrender to a corrupt Mexican dictator? Or is it a brutal example of U.S. expansionism, the story of a few white predators taking over what was sacred territory and half-willingly providing, with their death, the alibi for a well-planned annexation? (Trouillot 1995: 9).

The events of 1836 are far from settled.

Struggles over the meaning of “history” are of course commonplace, with even established stories facing challenges that invoke alternative understandings of the moral authority of those involved. But the stakes of some disagreements are higher than others, particularly when an alternative narrative calls into question the authority of those in power to rule. During the 1997 anti-Israeli trade fair, the response of the police line—performing traditional Bedouin song and dance—sought to deflect the protesters’ accusations that the former were betraying the nation by defending Israeli’s ability to profit through the creation and expansion of economic projects on Jordanian soil. But in invoking that history through a politics of authenticity—by suggesting that the “Jordanian-ness” of Bedouin is beyond question—the performance of the Bedouin officers brought to the fore a political order that long preceded the Hashemite arrival. It matters less that the pre-Hashemite order was never a unified one, but that the narratives of that history continue to call Hashemite authority into question by marking its late appearance on the scene. Police officers loyal to the regime, in their efforts to fend off accusations of betraying the nation, invoked symbolism of a political order and identity that excluded the regime.

Even more politically significant, this invocation of the Hashemite regime as an interloper surfaced again during the protests in Jordan that can be identified as part of the Arab uprisings that began in late 2010; this time, the message was aimed directly at the regime and was both more explicit and more threatening. While protests have not been uncommon in many traditionally loyalist areas since 1989, protesters typically refrain from calling for an end to the regime and focus instead on specific policies and grievances. During and after the uprisings, however, talk spread in loyalist circles about King Abdullah being Jordan’s “last king.”³⁸ The Hashemite regime was not only a late-comer to the land of Jordan; its rule was to be only an interlude.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have built on Tilly’s notion of an encompassing comparison in order to understand the ways in which various actors at protest can offer alternatives to officially sanctioned narratives in ways that call into question the regime’s authority to rule. Those competing narratives can shape protest dynamics as well, particularly the meaning-making that accompanies (or seeks to accompany) the claims asserted at protest events. This dialectic approach, linking micro to macro, provides a much richer understanding of the political work that protests do.

³⁸ I am grateful to Bessma Momani for alerting me in 2012 to the prevalence of the “last king” discussions in traditionally loyalist areas, an insight that I subsequently confirmed during subsequent research trips.